

Cultural conflict and identity crisis english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



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\n[/[toc](#)]\n \nAlbert Chinualumogu Achebe, (born 16 November 1930) popularly known as Chinua Achebe, was a Nigerian novelist, poet, professor, and critic. He is best known for his first novel and magnum opus Things Fall Apart(1958), which is the most widely read book in modern African literature. Raised by his parents in Igbo town of Ogidi in south eastern Nigeria, Achebe excelled at school and won a scholarship for undergraduate studies. He became fascinated with world religious and traditional African cultures, and began writing stories as a university student. After graduation, he worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service and soon moved to the metropolis of Lagos. He gained worldwide attention for Things Fall Apart in the late 1950s; his later novels include No Longer at Ease(1960), Arrow of God(1964), A Man of the People(1966) , and Anthills of the Savannah(1987). Achebe writes his novels in English and has defended the use of English, a " language of colonisers", in African literature. In 1975, his lecture An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's " Heart of Darkness" became the focus of controversy, for its criticism of Joseph Conrad as " a bloody racist" and was later published. Achebe's novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influence, and the clash of Western and Traditional African values during and after the colonial era. His style relies heavily on the Igbo

oral tradition, and combines straightforward narration with representations of folk stories, proverbs, and oratory. He has also published a number of short stories, children's books, and essay collections. Since 2009, he has been the David and Marianna Fisher University Professor of African Studies at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, United States. *Things Fall Apart* has become one of the most important books in African literature. Selling over 8 million copies around the world, it has been translated into 50 languages, making Achebe the most translated African writer of all time. His second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, about a civil servant who is embroiled in the corruption of Lagos. The protagonist is Obi, grandson of *Things Fall Apart*'s main character, Okonkwo. Drawing on his time in the city, Achebe writes about Obi's experiences in Lagos to reflect the challenges facing a new generation on the threshold of Nigerian independence. Obi is trapped between the expectations of his family, his clan, his home village, and larger society. He is crushed by these forces (like his grandfather before him) and finds himself imprisoned for bribery. Having shown his acumen for portraying traditional Igbo culture, Achebe demonstrated in his second novel an ability to depict modern Nigerian life. Achebe's third book, *Arrow of God*, was published in 1964. Like its predecessors, it explores the intersections of Igbo traditions and European Christianity. Set in the town of Umuaro at the start of the twentieth century, the novel tells the story of Ezeulu, a chief Priest of Ulu. Shocked by the power of British intervention in the area, he orders his son to learn the foreigner's secret. As with Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, Ezeulu is consumed by the resulting tragedy. *A Man of the People* was published in 1966. A bleak satire set in an unnamed

African state which has just attained independence, the novel follows a teacher named Odili Samalu from the village of Anata who opposes a corrupt Minister of Culture named Nanga for his Parliament seat. Upon reading an advance copy of the novel, Achebe's friend John Pepper Clark declared: "Chinua, I know you are a prophet. Everything in the book has happened except a military coup!" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua_Achebe) In 1987 Achebe released his fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, about a military coup in the fictional West African nation of Kangan. A finalist for the Man Booker Prize, the novel was hailed in the *Financial Times*: "In a powerful fusion of myth, legend and modern styles, Achebe has written a book which is wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical commentators from 'overseas' who see nothing ever new out of Africa." An opinion piece in the magazine *West Africa* said the book deserved to win the Booker Prize, and Achebe was "a writer who has long had the recognition that has already been accorded him sales figures." The Prize went instead to Penelope Lively's novel *Moon Tiger*. The style of Achebe's fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people. He weaves folk tales into the fabric of his stories illuminating community values in both the content and the form of the storytelling. The tale about the Earth and sky in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, emphasizes the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine. Although Nwoye enjoys hearing his mother tell the tale, Okonkwo's dislike for it is evidence of his imbalance. Later, Nwoye avoids beatings from his father by pretending to dislike such "women's stories". Another hallmark of Achebe's style is the use of proverbs, which often illustrate the values of the rural Igbo tradition. He sprinkles them throughout

the narratives, repeating points made in conversation. Critic Anjali Gera notes that the use of proverbs in *Arrow of God* "serves to create through an echo effect the judgment of a community upon an individual violation." The use of such repetition in Achebe's urban novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, is less pronounced. A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels in the intersection of African tradition and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. The colonial impact on the Igbo in Achebe's novels is often effected by individual from Europe, but institution urban offices frequently serve a similar purpose. The character of Obi in *No Longer at Ease* succumbs to colonial-era corruption in the city: the temptation of his position overwhelm his identity and fortitude. The courtyards and the position of district commissioner in *Things Fall Apart* likewise clash with the tradition of Igbo, and remove their ability to participate in structure of decision-making.

CHAPTER TWO

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S NO LONGER AT EASE

Obi-Okonkwo is a young man of promise in the Umuofia village, son of devout catechist. He is selected by his village to go to England and earn a degree in a Law. He is the first one among the Umuofians to get a degree and get into the civil service. In England he changes law for literature, takes his degree and comes to settle in Lagos the then capital of Nigeria to join the education Department of a high salary privileges enjoyed by Europeans. He is idealistic and is conscious of the practice of bribery and corrupt practices in the civil service. He believes that this can be changed only if educated youth replaced the old men. He has a girl friend named Clara whom he met in

London and now thinks of marrying her. His people expect him to repay the loan given to him for studies and become a champion of their ideals. But Obi has liberated himself from both his father's Christianity and his tribe's customs and values though he is not openly so. Clara is an outcast shunned by the Inos. But Obi wants to marry her. He is unable to convince his family, friends or his clan about this. In the office he is soon tempted with bribes to get favours done for aspirants to foreign scholarship. There is also the offer of sexual favour, which he resists. But his lifestyle and his family commitments, coupled with his own lack of prudence paves way for his downfall. He quarrels with his sponsors the Umuofia Progressive Union over the repayment of the loan. He buys an expensive car to live in style. He is forced to borrow money from his friends and also from his girlfriend. He gets trapped in debt. This is further complicated by the pregnancy of his girlfriend, who refuses to marry him and gets rid of the child. She deserts him and he is overcome by guilt. His mother dies. He soon begins to accept bribes in order to pay off his debts. Finally the secret police trap him and he is brought to trial and found guilty. He loses his job. But his fellow Umuofians still remain his supporters in spite of what he has done. The novel ends where it began; where the White Judge delivering the verdict on Obi raises the question why a young man of such promise should become corrupt like other Africans. CHAPTER THREE

THE THEME OF GROWTH IN NO LONGER AT EASE

Things fall Apart (1958) is Achebe's first novel. Achebe took the title of the book from William Butler Yeats 'The Second Coming'. Things fall Apart, the

centre cannot hold. " The story is set in the 1890s, when missionaries and colonial government made its intrusion Ibo society. It depicts the life of Ogbuefi Okonkwo, ambitious and powerful leader of an Ibo community, who counts on physical strength and courage, Okonkwo's life is good: his compound is large, he has no troubles with his wives, his garden grows yams, and he is respected by his fellow villagers. When Okonkwo accidentally kills a clansman, he is banished from the village for seven years. But the real cause of his downfall is his blindness to circumstances and the missionary church, which brings with it the new authority of the British District Commissioner. In this process Okonkwo is destroyed, destroyed, because of his unwillingness to change which alienates him from the community. He is alone in his fight against colonialism. No Longer at Ease, a sequel to Things Fall Apart derives from the legacy for African cultures of colonial domination by Europeans. It received the Nigerian National Trophy for Literature, focuses on a young Nigerian man, Obi Okonkwo, who has lost connection with his African heritage and develops almost a hatred for the ruling elite, of which he is a part. After going away to England to get an education he hopes he can use to benefit all Nigerians, he returns home and finds that the country has lost all that he believed in. Because of walls set in front of him such as, the neo-colonial values of the Europeans, he is not able to do the things he wanted to for his people. No Longer at Ease brings to life a character that receives a European-oriented education that buries his culture, forcing him to lose sight of where he comes from, who he is, and where he is going. No Longer at Ease shares a relationship with Things Fall Apart, in that it is the ending to Okonkwo's (the main character in both No Longer at Ease and

Things Fall Apart) experiencing some trouble conforming to the changes brought by the Europeans. In Things Fall Apart, Okonkwo struggles to understand those changes and the fact that things are not as they always were. Achebe emphasizes how Europeans impose their ways, traditions and values, upon Africans and the destruction and dislocation the colonial process brought together with *Anthills of the Savannah* the above-mentioned novels form a trilogy. They present the early history of British colonialism in Nigeria from an afro-centric perspective. Because of their realistic cultural themes, these novels provide a better understanding of the indigenous Africans and reasons for their current struggles. The title of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* suggests the possibility of a time there was "ease". The struggles of the protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, a twenty-six year old Umuofian educated in the British Colonial system and at the university in Great Britain, are analogous to the struggles facing Nigerian society during the period at the end of colonization. Obi must manage the complexities occasioned by his position as a senior civil servant in the British colonial administration in Lagos and his "taboo" love for Clara, a nurse educated in Britain and an *osu*, a woman banned from marriage by tribal traditions. Obi is the son of Isaac Okonkwo the son of Okonkwo the hero of *Things Fall Apart*. Isaac had converted to Christianity rejecting his father. Obi is the short form of 'Obiajulu' which in Ibo means the 'mind at last is at rest'. This name later proves to be an irony because Obi himself is not at ease between his people and the world, which he is made to live in. Obi is a dreamer and idealist in the beginning. While working on his English B. A. and living in Britain on funds provided by the poor members of his tribe, the Umuofian Union, Obi celebrates his country in

a poem, entitled " Nigeria." He writes, " How sweet it is to lie beneath a tree/
At eventime and share the ecstasy/ Of jocund birds and flimsy butterflies".
No Longer at Ease depicts the complicated picture of Nigeria that Obi finds
after four years study abroad. No Longer at Ease is a sensitive novel that
presents a broad view of humanity. Achebe deals frankly with a number of
controversial topics, including sexuality, racism, and corruption. Obi finds
himself at the intersection of a number of competing allegiances pulling him
incontradictory directions. Obi's poem, " Nigeria", quoted in various parts
throughout the novel, embodies the hopes for Nigeria that the novel, in its
unflinching realism, ultimately upholds: " God bless our noble
countrymen/And women everywhere. /Teach them to walk unity/ To build our
nation dear". No Longer at Ease is about a generation of Africans caught
between the value of a traditional society and the so-called modern
civilization represented by the colonizers from Europe. It traces the growth of
a man living in Nigeria in the mid 20th century. In this sense it can be called a
bildungsroman. Obi, the main character in the story goes through a lot of
change in the short time span in which the novel takes place. Obi's growth as
a man is influenced by just few decisions he makes, which have great
consequences for him and the others close to him . When we look at the life
of Obi we understand that this novel is a novel of growth. He grew from a
young, somewhat ignorant man to one who learns the meaning of family
and loyalty to his nation. Obi could have never guessed that he would accept
a bribe, but he does and has to pay for his actions. This story teaches the
reader a valuable lesson as well. When in time of trouble and turmoil, one can
always turn to the people that have supported them throughout their life. Obi

does not take the initiative to do this and it ultimately brings him to his downfall. If Obi had held true to his roots, it seems like he could have avoided most of the trouble he encounters in the novel. The life and career of Obi Okonkwo prove that the advent of white civilization 'loosed' a blood-dimmed tide of anarchy on African life. No wonder people like Obi who cannot put up with their disillusioning present meet with failure. On the one hand there is disillusion, with the native life, which is still in the vice-like grip of outdated ideas. On the other there is the futility of western education that proved ineffectual in closing the gulf of difference between caste and outcaste. CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Chinua Achebe's novel *No Longer at Ease* deals with the central problem of corruption and bribery in Nigerian society. The novel traces the career of Obi Okonkwo, an educated idealist Nigerian youth, who finally becomes part of what he opposed. His downfall is brought about through matters. They his inability to fight against corruption. The theme of bribery is highlighted in the first chapter itself. It opens with the court sentencing Obi for bribery. The judge raises the question how a promising young man like Obi should fall like this. The whole novel is an answer to this. Achebe presents the problem. But he does not seem to offer a solution to the problem of public corruption that has entrenched itself in Nigeria. Nigerian civil service is one of the most corrupt in the world. Achebe always criticized the leaders of Nigeria and its civil servant for pillaging their country. This novel is an honest examination

of the reasons behind Nigeria's failure to sustain a clean democratic administration.